



TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
JANUARY 24, 2006

MEMBERS PRESENT: Charlotte Murphy, Thomas Neeson, Tim Olmsted, John O'Shaughnessy, Terry Shook and Joe Wehr.

Chairman Wehr opened the Charter Revision Commission (CRC) Public Hearing at 7:02 p.m. He stated that the CRC has solicited input from staff, boards, commissions, agencies and civic organizations of the Town and received a number of recommendations. Mr. Wehr asked for comments from the audience.

Robert Pagani, Board of Finance Chair, asked the CRC to look at areas of duplicated services and to consider combining the services of the Board of Education and the Town that overlap. He noted that several Towns have addressed this issue successfully, i.e., Mansfield.

Nancy Way, Deputy First Selectman, asked the CRC to prepare a list of the advantages and disadvantages of a Town Manager form of government, if they are going to propose such a change. She was in favor of combining duplicate services; however, noted that it was not popular with the Board of Education in the past.

Gary Feldman, 108 Ellington Avenue, came forward and made the following comments:

- Stated that the current form of government is dysfunctional, particularly with the budget process. He was in favor of a strong Mayor and Town Council form of government vs. hiring a Town Manager.
- Asked that if the Town pays for a study that the members of the board/commission/agency acknowledge that they have read and understand such study.
- Stated that the Department of Homeland Security has mandated that emergency personnel be trained to a certain level and if that training is not obtained that they can withhold federal funding.
- Referenced Section 501 and suggested including language that would add Board of Selectmen liaisons to Town boards/commissions/agencies. He stated that currently the Board of Selectmen has liaison assignments but some do not show up to meetings unless they are invited.
- Change the language in Section 502 to require an annual meeting with all town boards, commissions and agencies.
- Add more responsibility to the Public Safety Commission or eliminate the Commission all together.
- List the duties of the Planning & Zoning Commission.
- List the duties of the Director of Emergency Management.
- Spell out the services provided by the Fire Departments and Ambulance Service.
- Reference the 5-year plan in Chapter X. Finance

Tom Stack, Board of Assessment Chair, recommended added additional members to the Board of Assessment Appeals for the assessment years prior and following an evaluation. He also suggested the CRC consider establishing a Personnel Appeals Board to address grievances filed by employees not represented by a Union.

Dennis Milanovich, 70 Crane Road, supports the recommendation to consolidate town building maintenance. He explained that building maintenance is difficult for the Board of Education to address when they are faced with budget issues for education. He stated that invariably they would always choose education over the building maintenance, at the detriment to the infrastructure. Mr. Milanovich spoke in favor of hiring a Town Manager/Administrator noting it is difficult to find people to run for a 2-year term for a 24/7 job with meager compensation. To address concerns with how a Town Manager could be removed, he suggested structuring the position to allow for removal.

Kevin Hart, 25 Crane Road, agreed with Mr. Milanovich and added that the Board of Education should concentrate on educating children rather than building maintenance.

Leo Miller, Board of Selectmen Member, referenced a letter he submitted to the CRC. In reference to the suggestion to change the form of government, he stated that a Town Manager would bring a degree of professionalism to the position and suggested the requirements include a master in public administration. He also suggested the CRC look into hiring an Administrative Officer rather than a Town Manager to ease the transition. He recommended contacting CCM for information. Mr. Miller also suggested that the CRC consider adding an Ethics Commission to the Charter. Mr. Miller reviewed the current open space requirements for subdivisions and suggested language be added to the Charter regarding how parcels are assessed.

Jesse Amsel, 103 Reeves Road, asked the CRC to address the rapid growth of the Town.

Peter Charter, Board of Selectmen Member, urged the CRC to add language that would allow the Board of Selectmen to split the budget, general government vs. Board of Education, in the event the budget is sent to referendum. He also asked the CRC to talk to other Towns that have changed to a Town Manager form of government to find out the pros and cons.

Bob Thiesing, 67 Kibbe Road, was in favor of exploring the Town Manager form of government, as it will provide continuity for staff and control costs. He was also in favor of combining Town services. Mr. Thiesing agreed with Mr. Amsel's comments regarding controlling growth.

Michael Stupinski, First Selectman, supports the proposal to combine town-wide services, noting that the Board of Education has a priority to provide quality education. In regards to a Town Manager, he stated one would be hired on the basis of credentials, i.e., education and experience vs. running for office and winning.

Mr. Feldman stated that Section 910 states that the Department of Public Works is responsible for the care and maintenance of all town buildings other than those under the jurisdiction of the Board of Education. He suggested amending the sentence to remove the reference to Board of Education buildings.

Ed Wysocki, 237 Jobs Hill Road, suggested the CRC consider establishing a Save the Farms Commission to explore ways to save the farmland in Town. He stated that he likes the present form of government and questioned what the cost would be to change to a Town Manager.

Mr. Charter stated that the Conservation Commission has invited the Commissioner of Agriculture to speak at their February 28, 2006 meeting regarding land preservation. The Board of Selectmen and other Boards and Commission will also be invited.

Dawn Bradshaw, 64 Shenipsit Road, stated that the Department of Environmental Protection will make an open space presentation at the Hall Memorial Library tomorrow night, January 25 at 6:15 p.m.

Al Lawrence, Fire Marshal, spoke in favor of combining duplicate services, noting the Finance Officer and the Board of Education Business Director perform the same job plus they both have significant support staff. He stated that the Town would realize a considerable cost savings in combining these two jobs.

Chairman Wehr polled the audience regarding their support of a Town Manager or Town Administrator form of government. Most were in favor of exploring this change of government. He also asked how many support combining services and maintenance of town buildings. Most were in favor.

Chairman Wehr thanked everyone for attending and participating in the CRC Public Hearing. He reminded the audience that the CRC meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month and encouraged public participation.

Hearing no further comments, Mr. Wehr closed the Public Hearing at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Marie Sauvé
Recording Secretary